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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to survey the present status of reading in Alabama secondary schools. A survey of reading in secondary schools was designed to answer the following questions: What achievement or reading tests are presently administered in Alabama secondary schools? What is the purpose of such testing? What format is presently used in the teaching of reading? How are students guided into the reading programs which are offered? Are reading programs designed to reach the needs of all students? Have inservice programs been conducted in which faculty members have been trained to teach reading in their content areas? What changes need to be made in the field of reading in the secondary school? and Do secondary school teachers and administrators want to know more about the Right to Read program? One-tenth of the 1,048 public, private, and parochial schools which contained grade levels seven and above were included in the study. The results indicated that: 45 percent of the schools used achievement or reading test scores for placement of students in remedial reading, 70 percent taught reading in conjunction with literature, 30 percent offered elective classes in reading, 9 percent had no specific reading instruction, and 40 percent provided for the needs of the gifted reader. (WR)

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A Survey of Reading Programs in Secondary Schools in Alabama

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Developed by Dr. Terry Ley of Auburn University for Alabama Right to Read. Distributed to secondary principals, supervisors and directors of instruction in Alabama.

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A Survey of Reading Programs in Secondary Schools in Alabama

During the past fifteen years, reading instruction in secondary schools has become an accepted goal, though one still infrequently achieved. Before changes are made that will help Alabama meet that goal, we must answer the question: "What are secondary schools in Alabama doing about reading instruction?" Since research on the question is extremely limited, a survey of reading in secondary schools was designed to gather data on the following questions:

1. What achievement or reading tests are presently administered in Alabama secondary schools?

2. What is the purpose of such testing?

3. What format is presently used in the teaching of reading in the secondary schools?

4. How are students guided into the reading programs offered by secondary schools?

5. Are reading programs in secondary schools designed to reach the needs of all students?

6. Have inservice programs been conducted in which faculty members have been trained to teach reading in their content areas?

7. According to those working in the secondary program, what changes need to be made in the field of reading in the secondary school?

8. Do secondary school teachers and administrators want to know more about the Right-to-Read program in the secondary school?

Five hypotheses were tested:

1. The California Achievement Test is administered in most Alabama secondary schools, and reading test scores are used to place students in levels within a grade.

2. Few diagnostic reading tests are administered.

3. Few secondary schools have developmental reading programs designed to meet the needs of all students.

4. Few inservice programs designed to teach reading methods to teachers in the secondary content areas have been offered.

5. Teachers of English see a need for more teacher training in reading (in college pre-teaching or pre-service programs and in inservice programs), and for the establishment of reading programs in the secondary schools.

Methods

One-tenth (105) of the 1048 public, private, and parochial schools which contain grade levels seven and above were included in the systematic random sampling. The data was obtained from a survey of reading in secondary schools; the survey included both structured and unstructured items. Thirty-one percent of the questionnaires (N = 33) were returned.

Results

A wide range of educators answered the survey questions: English teachers, 52% (17); principals, 13% (4); reading teachers, 15% (5); guidance counselors, 6% (2); special education teachers, 3% (1); no title given, 13% (4).

Table 1 presents a list of reading and achievement tests presently administered in secondary schools in Alabama. The California Achievement Test (CAT) was given in 76% (25) of the schools surveyed.

Table 1. Standardized achievement and reading tests presently given in secondary schools in Alabama (N=33)

Title of test	Percent of schools giving test
California Achievement Test	76% (25)
Gates-McGinitie Reading Test	18% (6)
Dolch Basic Reading Test	15% (5)
Metropolitan Achievement Test	12% (4)
Iowa Silent Reading Test	9% (3)
Scholastic Diagnostic Reading Test	9% (3)
Botel Reading Inventory	6% (2)
Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty	6% (2)
Nelson-Denny Reading Test	6% (2)
Scott-Foresman Reading Test	6% (2)
Stanford Reading Test	6% (2)
Doren Diagnostic Reading Test	3% (1)
Gates Basic Reading Test	3% (1)
Gilmore Oral Reading Test	3% (1)
Ginn Reading Test	3% (1)
Gray Oral Reading Test	3% (1)
SRA Reading Test	3% (1)

Table 2 presents the purposes for which secondary schools use achievement or reading test scores. Forty-five percent of those schools surveyed indicated that the purpose of such testing was placement of students in remedial reading classes. Forty-two percent indicated that test scores were used to place students within sections in a grade level. Others administered standardized reading or achievement tests to meet the requirements of the state or county department of education.

Data presented in Table 3 revealed the format of reading programs in secondary schools. Seventy percent of secondary schools teach reading in conjunction with literature. Sixty-seven percent have special classes for remedial reading. Developmental reading instruction appears to end at the eighth grade level, and only thirty percent of the schools surveyed offered elective classes in reading. In approximately one-fifth of schools surveyed,

Table 2. Purposes given by secondary schools for the administration of standardized achievement or reading tests (N=33)

Purpose given for testing	Percent of secondary schools citing this purpose
Placement of students in remedial reading classes	45% (15)
Placement of students in sections within a grade level	42% (14)
Testing required by state or county department of education	18% (6)
Test results used to check level of reading ability	12% (4)
Tests used for diagnostic purposes	9% (3)
No purpose given	9% (3)
Testing used to check progress at semester's end	9% (3)
Test results recorded in cumulative folder	3% (1)
Tests used for pre- and post-testing in reading classes	3% (1)
Test results used in recommendations for high school	3% (1)

a concentrated effort is made to teach reading in all subject matter fields. Nine percent have no specific reading instruction, and two schools teach reading in special education classes only.

Table 3. Format of secondary school reading programs in Alabama (N=33)

Possible format	Percent of secondary schools using this format
Reading taught in conjunction with literature	70% (23)
Remedial reading classes	67% (22)
Developmental reading classes	30% (11)
Elective classes in reading	24% (8)
Reading taught as a concentrated effort in all major subject matter areas	21% (7)
No specific reading instruction	9% (3)
Special education classes in reading	6% (2)

Data presented in Table 4 reveals that methods of placing students in secondary school reading programs vary in schools throughout the state. Thirty percent of schools surveyed placed students according to test score evaluation. Eighteen percent relied upon teacher recommendation of students. Developmental reading was required for all students in four schools surveyed; none of these schools contained grade levels higher than grade eight. Other means of assigning students to reading classes mentioned less often were counselor recommendation, elective courses, parent-teacher conference, examination and evaluation of materials in cumulative folders, and informal test situations.

Table 4. Methods used by secondary schools in assignment of students to reading programs (N=33)

Metnod	Percent of secondary schools surveyed using this method
Test score evaluation	30% (10)
Teacher recommendation	18% (6)
Developmental reading required for all students	12% (4)
Counselor recommendation	9% (3)
Elective courses	9% (3)
Parent-teacher conference	6% (2)
Cumulative record examination	3% (1)
Informal test situation	3% (1)

Data presented in Table 5 revealed that seventy-nine percent of schools surveyed felt that they reached the slow-learning reader, the student with low intelligence and low reading expectency level. Sixty-four percent of the schools surveyed felt they reached normal readers, those students having no severe reading problems who were developing at the normal expectency rate. Needs of disabled readers, those students with average or above average

intelligence who read below grade level, were met by fifty-eight percent of the schools surveyed. Approximately forty percent of the schools provided for the needs of gifted readers.

Table 5. Reading students provided for by secondary school reading programs (N=33)

Type of reading student	Percent of secondary schools surveyed who provided for this type of reading student
Slow-learning reader	79% (26)
Disabled reader	58% (19)
Normal reader	64% (21)
Gifted reader	48% (16)

Inservice programs designed to teach secondary faculty members to teach reading in their content areas have been conducted in twenty-nine percent of the schools surveyed.

Ninety-three percent of teachers surveyed requested more data on the Right-to-Read program at the secondary school level.

Changes suggested for secondary school reading programs in Alabama were heavily concentrated in three areas:

1. Specific preservice programs for the preparation of reading instructors in the secondary content areas need to be developed for both college curricula and inservice programs.

2. Secondary school reading programs need to be established in all schools throughout all grade levels, with heavy emphasis placed on the individualization of students within the classroom.

3. Low-level, high-interest materials should be provided to secondary teachers for use by their students.

Teachers also advocated reducing class size and hiring more teachers. They also suggested that classrooms be made more conducive to reading achievement by establishment of classroom libraries, quiet surroundings, and more flexible arrangements of furniture.

Discussion

The results of this survey of reading in Alabama secondary schools indicate that seventy-six percent of schools surveyed administer the California Aptitude Test (CAT). Forty-five percent of schools surveyed use the test results either to place the student in remedial reading classes, or to assign students to sections within a particular grade level. Perhaps a closer analysis of the CAT is in order.

Mavogenes (1974) classifies the CAT as an analytical test designed to measure vocabulary, study skills, and comprehension in different types of materials. The 1970 revision is an improved, well-standardized version for survey purposes. Blanton (1972), however, contends that CAT users will be unable to determine to what extent their particular populations correspond to the standardization group with which the test was normed. Reliability data was measured using the Kuder-Richardson-20 estimates which, while desirable, ignore response variability of subjects and varying effects of testing conditions. No other reliability information is provided. Only content validity of the CAT is presented, and it is reportedly based on a nation-wide review of widely-used reading tests and a study of curricular objectives and courses of study from a cross-section of states. However, the specific materials surveyed, their vintage, and the qualifications of the reviewers are not cited. Blanton (1972) believes many of the objectives of the publisher are not measured by the test.

In other words, the CAT does not necessarily reveal how Alabama students compare to those in other areas of the country. Reliability information is insufficient. Administrators and teachers should regard CAT scores with a degree of skepticism and should rely on their own observations and diagnostic test scores to determine a student's reading ability and level.

In spite of its limitations Blanton (1972) feels that the 1970 version of the CAT represents a marked improvement over older editions. However, the test is best suited as a survey measure of a junior or senior high school student's general reading ability, and not as an indicator of specific reading problems.

Karlin (1970) maintains that standardized reading tests are narrow in scope: they measure only a few of the skills judged important by reading specialists. They fail to measure small units of growth. A third weakness is the difficulty of interpreting incorrect responses. Did the student fail to understand the meaning of the given word, or was he unable to read the word? The grade placement score attained on most standardized reading tests by a poor or a gifted reader frequently fails to represent even in a general way his actual reading ability.

Ideally, once teachers have obtained student scores on the CAT, they should administer diagnostic tests to determine the strengths and weaknesses in reading of each student in order that individual needs may be met. Students should not be grouped according to reading levels indicated by the CAT scores. Such lock-step grouping fails to recognize the needs of the student. Groups should form and dissolve for many reasons: to teach a skill needed by several children, regardless of reading level; to take advantage of abilities present in individual students; to allow for student tutoring; etc.

Only a fraction of one percent of schools surveyed feel they meet the needs of all students in reading. Ideally, reading should be an all-school, all-faculty responsibility, coordinated by a reading specialist. Until this goal is achieved, responsibility for reading will often fall upon the teacher of English. But the NCTE Committee on National Interest and the Continuing Education of Teachers (1964) found that 90 percent of teachers of English do not feel well prepared to teach reading: "And employing specialized remedial reading teachers in the secondary schools is not likely to reduce to any degree the continuing responsibility of the teacher of English who must supervise each student's development in reading throughout his years in school." Sending the student out of the classroom to a remedial specialist will not solve the problem of what to do with the poor reader while he is in the English, math, science, or social studies classroom. Each content area involves the use of unique reading skills which often are not included in the remedial reading teacher's basic curriculum.

Preparation for teaching the reading component of English is finally receiving attention. Institutes and workshops on the teaching of specialized methods of reading in the secondary school content areas are being developed, but too often such programs are one-day or one-afternoon workshops designed to meet inservice requirements of the state or county department of education. Such a program cannot begin to convey the complexities of diagnosing and remediating those students who have reading problems. At best, some inservice programs are pre-primers in reading methods.

More emphasis should be placed on the undergraduate and graduate student's course requirements. All undergraduate students specializing in education should be required to take courses which will result in knowledge of corrective

and developmental reading techniques. Master's level programs designed to instruct teachers in the field of reading in the secondary schools are being developed and teachers should be encouraged to enroll in such courses.

Improving the reading of secondary school students requires administrative flair, a variety of high quality materials, and teachers who are highly motivated and skillful in teaching reading in the major content areas.

The results of this survey indicate the present status of reading in Alabama secondary schools. Now that we are more aware of where we stand, we can begin to build effective reading programs which will prepare better readers for the future.

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SECONDARY READING SURVEY

NAME _____

TITLE _____

SCHOOL _____

ADDRESS _____

1. In Column 1, check any of the following achievement or reading tests which are given in your school. In Column 2, list the size of the group tested. In Column 3, list the grade level of the group tested.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
____American School Achievement Tests	_____	_____
____Botel Reading Inventory	_____	_____
____California Reading Test	_____	_____
____California Achievement Tests	_____	_____
____Diagnostic Reading Scales (Spache)	_____	_____
____Scholastic Diagnostic Reading Tests	_____	_____
____Dolch Basic Reading Tests	_____	_____
____Doren Diagnostic Reading Test	_____	_____
____Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty	_____	_____
____Gates Basic Reading Test	_____	_____
____Gates-McGinitie Reading Test	_____	_____
____Gates-McKillop Reading Diagnostic Tests	_____	_____
____Gilmore Oral Reading Test	_____	_____
____Gray Oral Reading Test	_____	_____
____Iowa Silent Reading Test	_____	_____
____Iowa Test of Basic Skills	_____	_____
____Iowa Test of Educational Development	_____	_____
____McGuffey Diagnostic Reading Tests	_____	_____
____Metropolitan Achievement Tests	_____	_____
____Others: _____	_____	_____

2. Purpose of testing (check all those which apply):

____Placement of students in remedial reading classes
____Placement of students in sections within a grade level
____Other: _____

3. Check those items which apply to your school's reading program:

____Elective classes in reading
____Reading taught in conjunction with literature
____Reading taught as a concentrated effort in all major subject matter areas
____Developmental reading (through ____grade?)
____Remedial reading
____Other: _____

4. How are students guided into the reading programs offered by your school?

5. Does your school's reading program reach (check all those which apply):

____gifted readers
____normal readers
____slow-learning readers
____readers of average or above-average intelligence who read below grade level

6. Have inservice programs been conducted in which faculty members have learned to teach reading in their subject areas?

____Yes
____No

7. What changes would you like to see inaugurated in the field of secondary reading in your school?

8. Would you like to know more about the Right-to-Read Program in the secondary field?

____Yes
____No